Q. How do you approach preparing for an appearance like the one you have today? What are you thinking about in terms of what you want to convey?

A. First, by researching the subject matter in my area of interest. Where African folk tales are concerned, I tend to prefer picture books because I can refer to my audience to them so that they can learn the stories themselves and have a visual image of the emotional impact the characters have on each other and their environment. After finding the appropriate story, I begin to memorize it by picturing the various costumes and characters in the story. After that, the characters take on their own lives and the story continues. In this story, the emphasis is upon the depth of characteristics shown by both children in the community in which they live.

Q. What lessons do you hope guests take from today's performance?

A. The vital structure of community and the relationships people have with each other and their environment, and with the earth that nurtures them.

Q. We spoke briefly this week about the growth it takes to go from downplaying one's emotional expression, to more openly embracing the spectrum of human emotion that a person genuinely feels in the moment. What has that process been like for you?

A. For me, the process of emotional expression, being open or covert, begins with my ability to reverse roles with the character in order to better understand and express what their conflicts and intentions might be. I've started down this road by giving the characters voices and mannerisms that I could express as a storyteller. The result has been increased enjoyment from the audience as they experience various levels of the characters' personalities. I find that the more engaged I am as a storyteller, the more engaged my audience is to be. The more engaged the audience, the more deeply they receive the message of the author.

Q. How has this increased emotional openness shown up in your work as an artist? Would you say it's helped your work? Made it more difficult?

A. Emotional openness is learned by repetition. The more I have engaged in this process, the more easily I am able to understand the characters I am portraying and bring life to their words. This has helped me to become a more expressive artist, and more effectively bring life's nuances and lessons to the forefront for the audience. I believe this is making me a better person, which adds to my ability to be a better communicator and a more effective storyteller.

Q. You've been recognized for the contributions of your work in significant ways over the years, with inclusion in the San Diego Women's Hall of Fame, as a Legacy Artist Fellow through the California Arts Council, and most recently as an honoree in the San Diego African American Museum of Fine Art's "Keepers of the Culture" event next Friday. What has it meant to you to be recognized in these ways?

A. The abundant recognition from my community is serving to facilitate my growth and development in this senior season of my life. I have always and worship of the creator, continue to light my way. I can only be who I am. I can only be a way-shower for those who are willing to be mentored. My choice of events, creative content and style of presentation are my methods for keeping, expanding and uplifting Black culture.

Q. Why has it been important to you to focus your work in this way?

A. In the era into which I was born, there was an overarching intention to marginalize the African influence upon American culture, to exclude the Afro-centric influence. My style of storytelling is my method of expressing who I am as an African American woman. Everything — from my choice of language, to costume, to music, to the vibrant smile and laughter I express in my storytelling — serves this purpose. These are all important areas of focus in my work.

Q. What's been challenging about your work as an artist?

A. The most challenging part has been to see myself as productive in my service as an artist. I always volunteered my artistic work while being paid for my profession. The challenge for me in this season is to receive from my service as an artist the support that I need for living.

Q. What's been rewarding about this work?

A. The joy that I see expressed in the eyes and reactions of the audience. The bringing together of a community where people can see themselves as one family of human beings and relate to one another in a loving manner.

Q. What has this work taught you about yourself?

A. It has taught me that I have the ability to create a safe space in which people can experience emotions and reactions to situations that might never have imagined prior to this artistic experience. For many people, this is a first.

Q. What is the best advice you've ever received?

A. Know yourself and be yourself!

Q. What is one thing people would be surprised to find out about you?

A. That I really am a very shy person.

Q. Please describe your ideal weekend.

A. A joy-filled weekend at the beach, with a band, good food, great company, lots of laughter, and beautiful art.